3: Fortes E-5 (1934-1937) 1949
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853 854 nothing else to do, her babe is at the breast, sucking hungrily or, if it is replete, just playing with the breast with its mouth, its fingers, and its toes. If the mother is away another woman of the household will give the baby medicated water to drink when it cries or will put it to her breast for comfort. It may be any woman of the family, but will usually be a co-wife.

853 862 By the age of 18 months a baby's diet is being regularly supplemented with small lumps of porridge, often pre-masticated by its mother. It is gradually and usually painlessly weaned by increasing its solid food (chiefly porridge), until it is eating the same food as the adults. The only time Tale women have to wean a baby abruptly is if they become pregnant through lack of self-control during the nursing period. Tallensi say that this distresses the baby but that harsh measures are not required as a pregnant woman's milk disgusts a baby. They also say that the premature deprivation of its mother's milk prevents the child from thriving. In fact the premature pregnancy of its mother is probably more of a psychological deprivation for the child than a nutritional loss. By the time a child has its milk teeth and is able to run about, at the age of about 3, it gets no more nourishment from the breast. But its mother's breast is still its chief solace. If it is in pain, or frightened, or just tired and peevish, it cuddles into its mother's arms and clings to her breast for consolation, and a younger baby makes this impossible.

855 593 The completion of weaning marks the first stage in the child's physical and psychological severance from its mother. It has learnt to do without its mother for hours or days at a stretch. It remains contentedly in the care of an elder sister or other member of the household or even its maternal grandmother, as long as it is well and not hungry. It runs about and plays with other children of the homestead and neighbouring homesteads. It can talk fluently and so communicate its wishes to others. And its independence is increased when its mother becomes pregnant again and it can no longer run to the breast for comfort. Its mother is still the centre of its universe—and will remain so for two or three years more, in the case of a boy, and until marriage, for a girl—but the toddler has begun to glimpse the wider social space into which it is growing. Since it began to crawl it has often been told to 'go to your mother (own mother)', 'go to your mother so-and-so (mother's co-wife)', 'go to your grandfather (or grandmother)', 'go to your father (own father)', 'go to your father so-and-so (father's brother)', 'go to Yin, Tee, Baa (a sibling)' by one or other member of the family. Thus it has learnt to divide the people who come into its social space into 'own mother', 'own father', 'other mothers and other fathers' (who take care of it now and then), and 'other children', those whom it plays with, or eats with, or sees about the house. Own parents stand out clearly to the infant—its mother for obvious reasons, its father, as one man put it, 'because she (his little daughter) is often told and because she sleeps with her mother and sees

4: Fortes and Fortes E-5 (1934-1936) 1936
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own efforts in time of scarcity. Each woman cares for her own children only. She keeps food for an absent child, but will offer some to a co-wife's child only if it asks her for it. But the man will give food to all his children. As a rule, he eats the portion sent in by his senior wife and tastes a little from each dish brought in by the others. When he has had his fill he calls his children to come and eat the rest, always remembering those who have not had enough. Thus the discrepancy in the distribution of grain, where each woman gets the same share irrespective of the number of mouths she has to feed, is adjusted by the man in his fair re-distribution of the cooked food.

This general pattern is not a rigid one, but is adapted to the structure of every household and to its special circumstances, e.g. a man would eat with his wife and small children from a common dish if they happened to be alone in the compound. To do so if another wife were present would cause envy and quarrelling between the women; these arrangements are a matter of etiquette and not of taboo.

The natives account for the custom of a man's eating with his 'youngest' child on the grounds that a child must eat properly in order to grow and must be taught to do so. They say, also, that it thus learns to know its father, and not only its mother whom it is always following about. We have not sufficient material to judge the validity of this interpretation; it is quoted here to indicate the native valuation of the sharing of food in the family.

Infants are given morsels of porridge as soon as they can swallow solid food, and by the age of 18 months can feed themselves dexterously. They are weaned by the age of three not by a forcible or harsh separation from the breast, but by gradual habituation to adult food. The emphasis on the adequate feeding of children is shown, also, in the manner in which *sayakərət*, left-over porridge, is reserved for them. Porridge remaining after the noon meal is stirred into the porridge cooked at sunset; if it is left after the evening meal it is given to children cold for breakfast next day. Only after they have eaten their fill will adults have some. In the months of plenty children often have a morning meal of *sayakərət*; at other times a handful of ground-nuts, or a dish of flour-water or of dawa-dawa powder must suffice.

Flour-water (*zɔmkuom*) deserves a note to itself. There are two ways